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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 000580

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STATE FOR AF/W
STATE FOR INR/AA
STATE PASS OPIC FOR ZHAN AND MSTUCKART
DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY
WARSAW FOR LISA PIASCIK
CIUDAD JUAREZ FOR DONNA BLAIR
ISTANBUL FOR TASHAWNA SMITH
SAO PAULO FOR ANDREW WITHERSPOON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/14/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: EBONYI STATE EXPERIENCES A SEAMLESS TRANSITION

REF: LAGOS 248

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Classified By: Acting Consul General Donald McConnell for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary: In a July 31 visit by Pol-econ chief to Ebonyi State, Governor Martin Elechi praised U.S. involvement in Nigeria and cited his top priorities as reforming the civil service and promoting development. Some observers contended Elechi's bureaucratic experience and acumen would benefit Ebonyi. However, Elechi's commissioners are largely holdovers from the previous administration of former Governor Sam Egwu, and there is uncertainty whether the Elechi administration will differ significantly from its predecessor. While the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) has claimed they have the evidence to overturn the gubernatorial election, the tribunal's decisions have favored the ruling party, so for now Ebonyi remains a state dominated by the People's Democratic Party (PDP). End summary.

Visit to the Ebonyi State Governor

12. (U) On July 31, Pol-econ chief visited Ebonyi State Governor Martin Elechi in the government house. In a closed-door meeting, Governor Elechi appeared delighted to meet the Consulate delegation, and expressed his gratitude for U.S. involvement in Nigeria. Elechi told Pol-econ chief that from 1963-1966 he had studied in Kinshasa under a USAID grant, and he recalled U.S. involvement under the Carter administration to rid Nigeria of a Guinea worm epidemic.

13. (U) Elechi's first priority would be to reform the civil service, though Elechi did not comment exactly how he would lead reform beyond "changing the mindset". Elechi asserted his administration's two main challenges were to reduce the reliance on the executive for all decision making, and to press for economic development in the state.

¶4. (C) In a meeting with political observers from the media, journalists praised Elechi's experience and lack of pretense. Felix Uka, correspondent for the Daily Independent, told Poloff that Elechi's experience had allowed him to take some positive steps to reform, as Elechi had already reduced the number of ministries and shuffled some members of the civil service in the name of efficiency.

¶5. (C) Elechi reappointed many of Egwu's former commissioners, even handing some the same portfolios. Nonetheless, Godwin of Radio Nigeria, an Elechi supporter, contended the Governor did not take orders from Egwu, and commented despite his qualifications people had a tendency to underestimate Elechi. Godwin added Elechi had reached out to the opposition, appointing the state ANPP Director of Planning Egwu Chima and two rivals for the PDP gubernatorial nomination. Since Elechi had become Governor, his unpretentious mien had led to less hubbub and fewer hangers-on at the government house, Godwin added. Uka commented while Egwu had made strides in education, many of the projects which the former Governor initiated during his eight-year tenure remained incomplete, adding that hopefully Elechi would see more projects to fruition.

¶6. (C) Ebonyi State had a very uneven election, Uka observed, remarking some places held voting while in others it was nonexistent. Uka noted the tribunal had ordered the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to provide all its voting materials for inspection, although INEC so far had not complied, claiming the materials were with the local governments. Uka saw some petitioners possibly winning their

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cases, but he considered it too difficult to overturn the gubernatorial election because of the PDP's strength and the tribunal's ability to dismiss a petition on technicalities. ANPP gubernatorial candidate Ogbonnaya Onu, the strongest petitioner, was seen as an outsider because he was originally from Abia state, noted Uka. Godwin concurred, and added while the ANPP has strong support, the court had chastised some of the petitioners for their lack of evidence.

ANPP: We Can Win at the Tribunal

¶7. (C) Ebonyi State ANPP Chairman Nwambe Livinus told Poloff while the tribunals have so far progressed well for the party, INEC had not provided all the materials despite a tribunal order. Livinus asserted the ANPP knew INEC had failed to run the election properly as "what they had to do they failed, and what they did was incorrect". Despite INEC's delaying tactics, Livinus was confident of victory, and told Poloff that at the tribunal proceedings so many ANPP supporters had attended INEC complained.

¶8. (C) Livinus said the ANPP believed the courts were sound and would make the right judgment, as he showed poloff the documents INEC had already submitted. In the documents, INEC had crossed out the name president and handwritten governor on the result sheet, and INEC had submitted for inspection ballots with incorrect serial numbers. In Ebonyi, most places did not hold elections, Livinus alleged, as the government hired the drivers and many of the ad hoc workers, who drove to an undisclosed location to thumbprint the ballots. The ANPP had witnesses in most wards willing to testify there was no voting, Livinus said.

¶9. (C) While the Ebonyi ANPP received moral support from the national headquarters they were short on cash, commented Livinus, as the tribunal was very expensive and had forced

some petitioners to opt out of the proceedings. Livinus said turncoat Chima was a senatorial candidate who had sabotaged the ANPP and now received his prize, adding the ANPP had suspended Chima and disassociated itself from his decision to join the government. Ultimately, Livinus termed the tribunals as the last hope for democracy. While President Yar'Adua had announced his support for free and fair elections Livinus doubted his sincerity, but he claimed if the tribunal overturned the April results public scrutiny would ensure a better election. While Livinus did not know when the tribunal would decide, he claimed to not be worried since the Supreme Court's decision on Anambra State Governor Peter Obi guaranteed a four-year term should Onu win at the tribunal.

Comment

¶10. (C) With the PDP's dominance in the state the gubernatorial result was a foregone conclusion, though given the evidence the opposition could construct a solid case and force the tribunal to make a difficult decision. Egwu's choice of Elechi has some logic. A largely agricultural state with few resources, government is Ebonyi's biggest business and the state needed an experienced hand at the helm. It remains to be seen whether the heretofore unaffiliated Elechi can satisfy the various factions in the state, many of whom coveted the governorship for themselves.

Biographical Note on Governor Martin Elechi

¶11. (C) Governor Martin Elechi is in his seventies. Elechi likes small talk and has a dry sense of humor in meetings, and he prefers to take his own notes and reportedly travels

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with little entourage. After winning the PDP nomination, Poloff saw Elechi at the Enugu airport traveling with only one aide. Considered one of the founders of Ebonyi State, created in 1996, after the state's creation Elechi served as Minister of Public Works for the now-defunct Central Ebonyi region. Despite his standing in Ebonyi, Elechi's selection was a surprise; none of the major newspapers even listed Elechi as a candidate prior to the PDP primary. Despite his lack of a discernable base, former Governor Sam Egwu supported Elechi for the PDP nomination and convinced all the main contenders to withdraw.

MCCONNELL